

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 2, 2006

BALLONA WETLANDS ENHANCEMENT PLANNING

File No. 04-088

Project Manager: Mary Small

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to amend the Conservancy's December 2, 2004 authorization to allow disbursement of an additional amount up to \$245,000 for technical studies, planning, data collection, and other analysis associated with planning the restoration and enhancement of the Ballona Wetlands, Los Angeles.

LOCATION: West of Lincoln Boulevard and south of the Marina del Rey along the Ballona Creek Channel in Los Angeles County. A portion of the project is in the City of Los Angeles and a portion is in unincorporated Los Angeles County (Exhibits 1 & 2).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Coastal Resource Enhancement and Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Watershed Map

Exhibit 2: Project Area - Modeling Extent

Exhibit 3: December 4, 2004 Staff Recommendation

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 and 31400 et seq. of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby amends its December 4, 2004 authorization to add the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred forty five thousand dollars (\$245,000) for technical studies, planning, data collection, and other work associated with planning the restoration and enhancement of the Ballona Wetlands, subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of any funds for any work, the Conservancy’s Executive Officer shall approve the work plan, budget and the contractor for that work.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that the proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s December 4,

2004 findings regarding the Conservancy's enabling legislation and Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

In December 2004, the Conservancy authorized funds for restoration planning and interim site management of the 600-acres of the historic Ballona Wetlands owned by the State of California (Exhibit 3). This project is being implemented in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and the State Lands Commission (SLC), the two state agency owners of the property. This authorization would provide additional funds for hydrodynamic modeling of the restoration alternatives and some data collection work that was unanticipated at the time of the December 2004 authorization by the Conservancy.

Consistent with the Southern California Wetland Recovery Project's Regional Strategy, restoration of the Ballona Wetlands is being planned within the context of the remaining wetland complex. The hydrodynamic model will be constructed to include the Ballona Wetlands, Ballona Creek, Marina del Rey, Del Rey Lagoon, Ballona Lagoon and the Oxford Basin. The Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, is conducting a Feasibility Study of the Lower Ballona Ecosystem. The hydrodynamic model developed for evaluating restoration alternatives of the Ballona Wetlands will be provided as in-kind match to the Army Corps' study. A more detailed description of this project is provided in Exhibit 3.

Site Description:

The project area includes the 600-acres of the Ballona Wetlands owned by the Department of Fish and Game and the State Lands Commission. As shown on Exhibit 2, the hydrodynamic modeling work will also include other areas in the connected landscape, including: Ballona Creek, Marina del Rey, Del Rey Lagoon, Ballona Lagoon and the Oxford Basin. All of the project area is part of a much larger historic wetland complex which once occupied more than 2,000-acres. Please refer to Exhibit 3, Site Description, for a more detailed description of the project area.

Project History:

Please refer to Exhibit 3 for the project history.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Proposition 12, Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$245,000</u>
Total Project Cost (Current Phase)	\$245,000

Consistent with the Conservancy's December 4, 2004 authorization, this additional Conservancy funding would be derived from an appropriation of funds specifically designated for the Ballona Wetlands in the 2000 park bond, Proposition 12. Public Resources Code Section 5096.352(f) provides that \$25 million is available to the Conservancy for this purpose.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION, STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES, LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES, AND LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:

This authorization for additional funding for the project remains consistent with the Conservancy's December 4, 2004 authorization.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is an amendment for additional funding for a project previously exempted from CEQA under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15262, feasibility and planning activities (See Exhibit 3). However, the additional funding will be used for hydrological modeling unanticipated under the original authorization. This modeling also is categorically exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review under 14 CCR Section 15262 and 14 CCR Section 15306 (basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource). Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.